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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3550
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5730
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3445
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3309
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3973
RHEHNNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMCSSU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3953

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001252

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: PGOV PREL TX UN

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: FOR BERDIMUHAMEDOV, PRAISE FROM ANY SOURCE IS WELCOME

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia Reed Curran. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (U) On September 26, on the front page of state-run newspaper "Neytralniy Turkmenistan," there was a photo of the certificate and medal that were presented to President Berdimuhamedov on September 24 when he was in the United States for the UN General Assembly. The certificate was for "faithful promotion of information community" and was given to him by the International Informatization Academy, a consultant organization to the Economic and Social Council of the UN. The article about the award was next to an article of the same size about Berdimuhamedov's meeting with Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy. Another photo of the certificate and medal appeared in the September 28 issue of Neytralniy Turkmenistan as part of a photo montage of Berdimuhamedov's meetings on the margins of the UNGA, alongside photos of him with the Secretary, the UN Secretary General, the Turkish Prime Minister, and the Polish President.

¶2. (U) The article accompanying the photo of the award bore the title "A High International Award is Bestowed Upon Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov," but most of the text described Berdimuhamedov's participation at the UN General Assembly. Only the last two paragraphs were dedicated to the presentation of the award, with most of the space taken up by details of where the award presentation took place and who was present. However, the very end of the article clarified the Turkmen message, which is that they see the award as a sign of support for their "progressive" politics and recognition of Berdimuhamedov's model for peace and development.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: The large picture of the award in the national newspaper was just another example of the Turkmen government's focus on form over substance, as well as its penchant to portray itself as a major international actor. The declaration by Trenton, New Jersey of "Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov Day" also received disproportionate attention in the Turkmen state media (two days worth of press!). The national newspapers in Turkmenistan write about every meeting the president has and every award he receives with the same exalted level of pomp and circumstance and the same main

message: that Turkmenistan is being recognized as an important country on the world stage.

¶14. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: As another example, a September 25 "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" story on the FLEX student exchange program featured interviews from five different young people regarding their experiences at high schools in the United States. In addition to detailing their activities and life with their host families, it discussed the intense interest the other students, teachers and acquaintances had in Turkmenistan. Every FLEX student interviewed gave multiple presentations on Turkmenistan and answered numerous questions about their country. Their classmates were impressed by what they learned and dreamed about visiting. One FLEX student said, "the interest of the kids and teachers about our country, and in those changes which are occurring here in the epoch of the new revival was huge." Certainly, the American classmates were curious about Turkmenistan. However, given the attention span and typical interests of the average American teenager, these stories clearly must be exaggerations. Nevertheless, they serve to underscore and add to the narrative that Turkmenistan is important.

¶15. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: The mere announcement of an award or occurrence of a meeting is just as important to the Turkmen government as what the award represents or what the meeting accomplished. Businesses and international organizations that recognize this and cater to the Turkmen government's penchant for praise and its focus on visuals are better received than those that focus exclusively on substance. In the case of Berdimuhamedov, flattery is not only welcome, but expected. END COMMENT.
CURRAN